

HOW TO... Manage margins

Formatting your documents correctly makes them appear more professional and polished. Jennifer Bagley shows you how to leave no margin for error

Printed documents always have white space between the edge of the page and the text. This applies to word processing and spreadsheet documents. The amount of white space depends on the margins set for the document. Here we'll show you how these work and all the options available.

The focus in this tutorial is on Word 2003, but most of these options are also available in earlier versions of Word. Similar features are available in Works 7 and Ability Write 4.2, and we'll mention where it is applicable to Word only. Plus, there is a special tip for Excel users.

1 The Print Layout view is best when working with margins in Word. Go to the View menu and select Print Layout. This is the only view option in Works and Write. There should be rulers displayed across the top of the document and down the left-hand side. If you can't see any, go to the View menu and select Ruler. In Write, make sure Both is also selected. In Word, if you want to see the margins on the page, select Options from the Tools menu. On the View tab, make sure there is a tick in the box next to Text Boundaries.

2 The first part of the ruler is shaded, with two Indent markers (little triangles), after which the ruler is white. It is within the white area that you can enter text. The quickest way to change the margin is to hover the cursor between the two indent triangles, which should turn into a bar with an arrow at either end. When

it does, click and drag to the left or right (this will be up or down if you're changing margins on the ruler down the left-hand side of the page).

For more precise changes, press the Alt key at the same time, and the ruler will display the measurements of the page and the margins in centimetres. This can be quite tricky as it is easy to click on one of the indents by mistake. If you find it difficult to adjust the margins this way, go to Page Setup in the File menu. You may need to click on the Margins tab in some programs.

3 Excel has a neat option for centering text in the middle of the page, which is handy for when the data being printed is smaller than the page itself. To try this out, highlight the data you want to print. Go to File, Page Setup and click on the Margins tab. Under Center On Page, at the bottom of the dialog box, are two options. Horizontally will place text in the middle at the top of the page; vertically will do the same down the side. Ticking both boxes will put text right in the middle. Click on Print Preview, also in the File menu, to see the end result.

4 In Word, the Margins tab in the Page Setup dialog box has a few extra features. Say you wanted to change the margins for only a portion of the text. Highlight that text, and in the Page Setup dialog box click in the box under Apply To and choose Selected Text.

If no text is selected, you can choose From this point forward. Word will automatically insert section breaks around the text, putting the

selected text on its own page. If your text is already in a section, there's no need to highlight it. Just click in the section, apply the margin changes in the Page Layout box and select This Section in the Apply to box.

Clicking on the Default button at the bottom of the dialog box will apply the changes you've made to all future documents created from the active template. If that template is Normal.dot, all new documents opened will have these margin settings.

5 A gutter margin is extra space added to the side of a document so that text isn't lost when the document is bound. In Word you can set this using the Page Setup dialog box. Make sure Normal is selected in the box next to Multiple Pages. Enter a value in the Gutter box (the company binding the document can help you with this), and select the Gutter position (either left or top). In the Multiple Pages box there's also a Mirror Margins option. This means the margins on a left-hand page will be the mirror image of the margins on the right.

6 You can also adjust the margins around text within a text or shape box inserted in a document. Click in the text box to select it. Then double-click on the border around the text box (this has the resizing handles in it). In the dialog box that appears, click on the Text Box tab. The margin settings here determine the amount of white space between the text and the outside of the text box. 

EXPERT TIP

Different versions of Word handle line spacing differently, which can affect margins when opening a document from one version in another. Go to Tools, Options, Compatibility. Tick Suppress Extra Line Spacing at Bottom of Page, and Suppress Extra Line Spacing at Top of Page.

